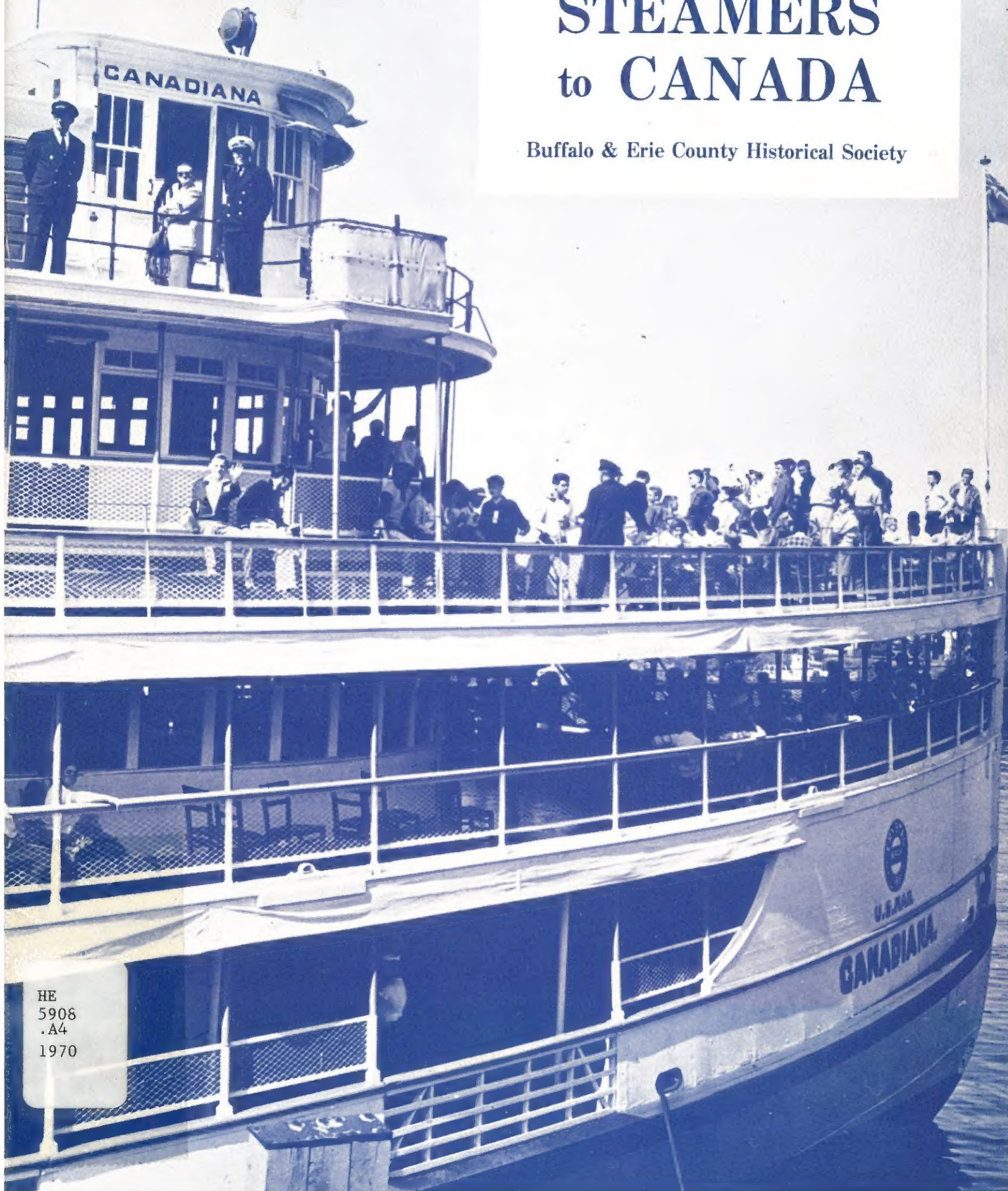


STEAMERS to CANADA

Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society



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Judging from the clothes and cars, this picture was taken in the early 1920's at the busy Crystal Beach dock at the foot of Commercial St. in Buffalo. The CANADIANA has either just unloaded or is about to load a good crowd escaping the hot streets of the city.

STEAMERS to CANADA

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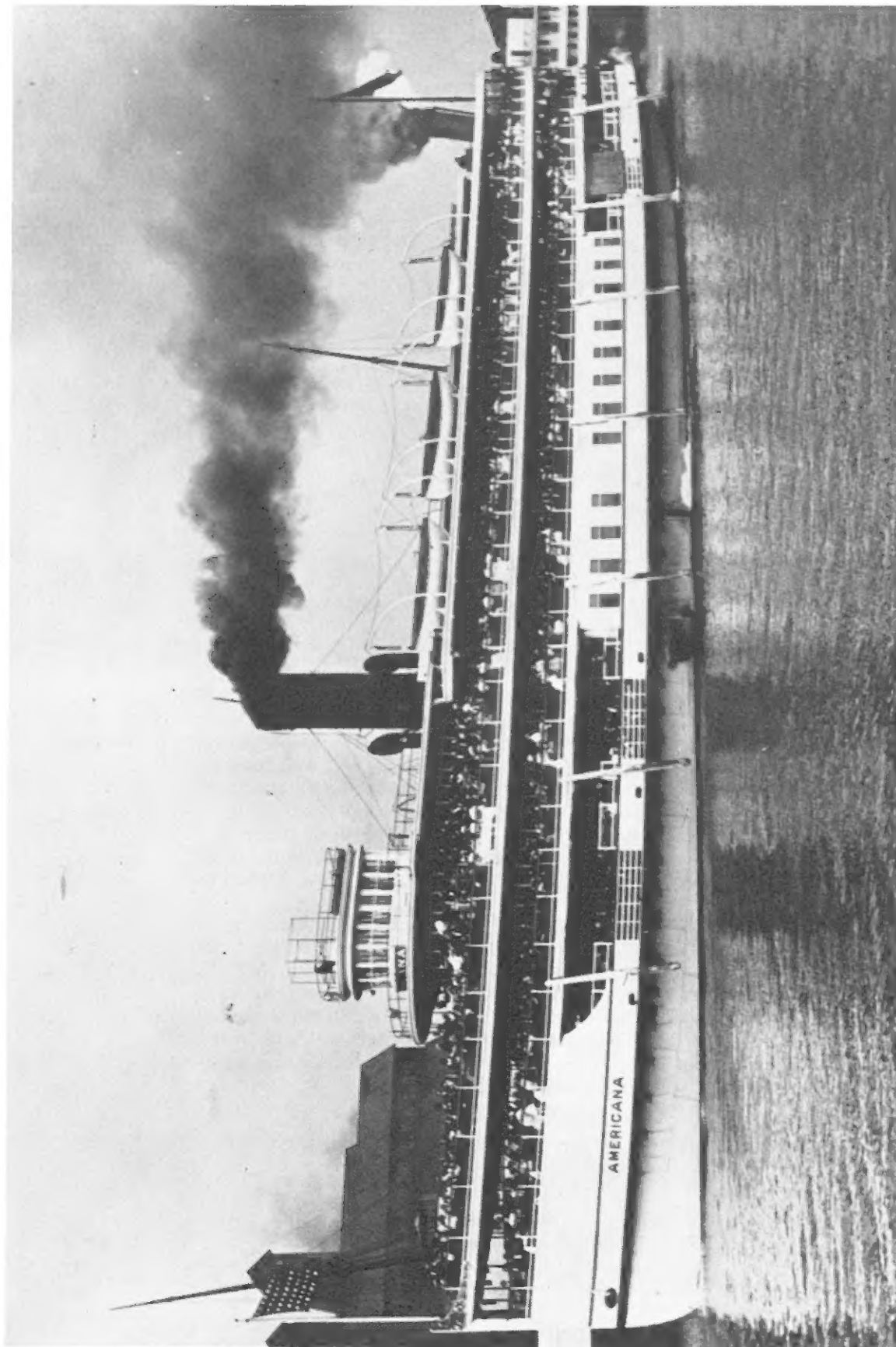
At the turn of the century most travel was by rail or boat and the general use of the automobile did not occur until the paved roads were built and highway bridges constructed. In the case of the Buffalo area, bridges across the Niagara River to Canada and to Grand Island were built rather late. Consequently the excursion and ferry boat lines operated much longer in this vicinity than in many comparable areas. The Peace Bridge from Buffalo to Fort Erie, Ontario was not ready for service until 1927, and the first Grand Island bridge was built in 1935.

The good sand beaches of the north shore of Lake Erie from Fort Erie west had been the incentive for building Crystal Beach Park and Erie Beach, both picnic and bathing spots for Buffalonians since the 1890's. Crystal Beach, before the event of paved roads, was accessible almost entirely by steamer. Erie Beach could be reached either by direct steamer from the Buffalo waterfront, or by ferry from Ferry Street, Buffalo to Fort Erie, and thence by a short railroad from the ferry dock to the beach. This railroad with the transcontinental sounding name of the Fort Erie Snake Hill & Pacific was a lightly built little line using cast-off equipment from the New York City elevated railroads. There was a steam dummy operated by the Michigan Central Railroad which did connect Buffalo to Canada via the railroad bridge, but this handled a very small part of the travel. The Fort Erie ferry operated many years after the Peace Bridge was built, in fact until 1951. Price was the big incentive, as the ferry charged about half as much as the bridge toll. Also, many people preferred the ferry for the chance to get a river ride and to watch the somewhat thrilling method of crossing the river while fighting the 9 mile current.

Erie Beach closed down after the 1931 season, but Crystal Beach became more popular than ever. All through the 1930's, 1940's, and well into the 1950's the CANADIANA carried the family and corporation picnics, the young and the old who did not drive, and the romantic couples who realized that nothing was nicer than moonlight on the lake. Troubles, other than poor business, closed down the steamer operation at the end of the 1956 season. The CANADIANA was good for many more years as was proven by its operation elsewhere.

This book is not a thoroughly researched history of all the steamers on these routes, but merely a nostalgic scrapbook of some of the boats operating from about the year 1910 until the end, boats that many living Western New York people remember with pleasure. The editors found most of the pictures in the files of the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society and in their own collections. They wish to thank Paul Redding of the Society for his help, and our thanks go also to Mr. James Hurley and to the Messer Foundation who made publication possible.

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The AMERICANA and CANADIANA were sister ships of identical dimensions, the AMERICANA being the senior ship built in 1908 especially for the Crystal Beach run. Though usually considered excursion vessels, they also served as commuter ships

for the many residents of Crystal and nearby beaches who worked in the city and spent their nights at the shore. The ship is pictured at or near her dock in the Buffalo River.

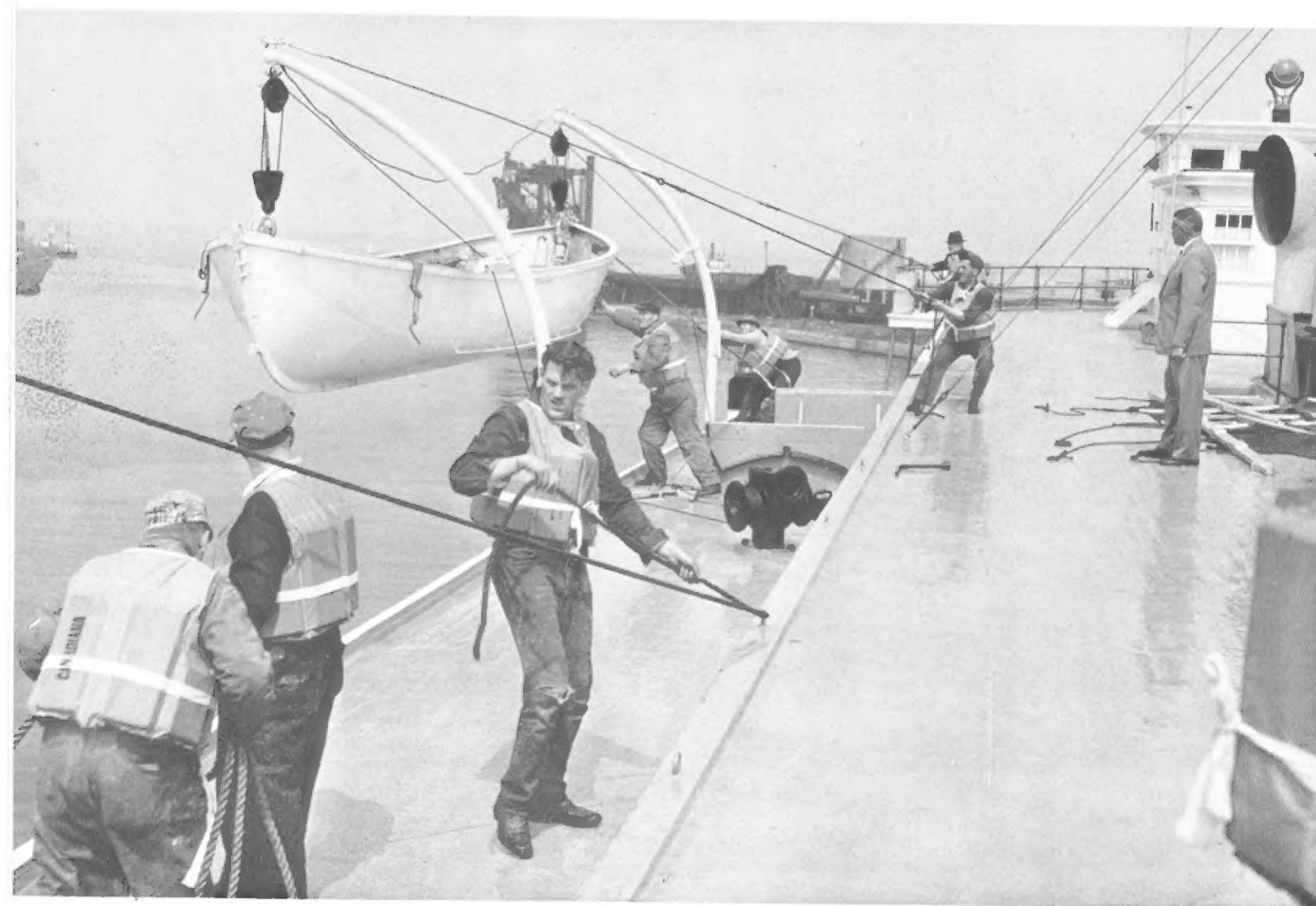


The building of the Peace Bridge cut down the demand for the heavy two boat service and the AMERICANA was sold in 1928 for service out of New York harbor to Rye Beach. The Meseck Line made very few changes to the ship and Buffalo residents often saw their "Crystal Beach boat" on their New York visits.



The CANADIANA, built in 1910 continued to operate up to six trips a day with surprising regularity through the 1956 season. High winds might make it miss a landing at the beach, but it seldom broke down. After Buffalo service it operated out of Toledo, Ohio for a couple of years until a collision with a bridge ended its revenue service. Many subsequent plans have been made for it, but after years of storage at Buffalo and Cleveland, it is still afloat as of 1970, but in bad condition.

While not matching the ornate interiors of the overnight steamers, the CANADIANA was not a plain boat. This view of the forward staircases shows a nice design in woodwork and stained glass.



This unusual shot of lifeboat drill on the CANADIANA was no doubt in preparation for the start of another season. It was not just luck which gave this ship such a good reputation, but good

maintenance and trained crews. There is no record of any passengers having to avail themselves of this emergency service.

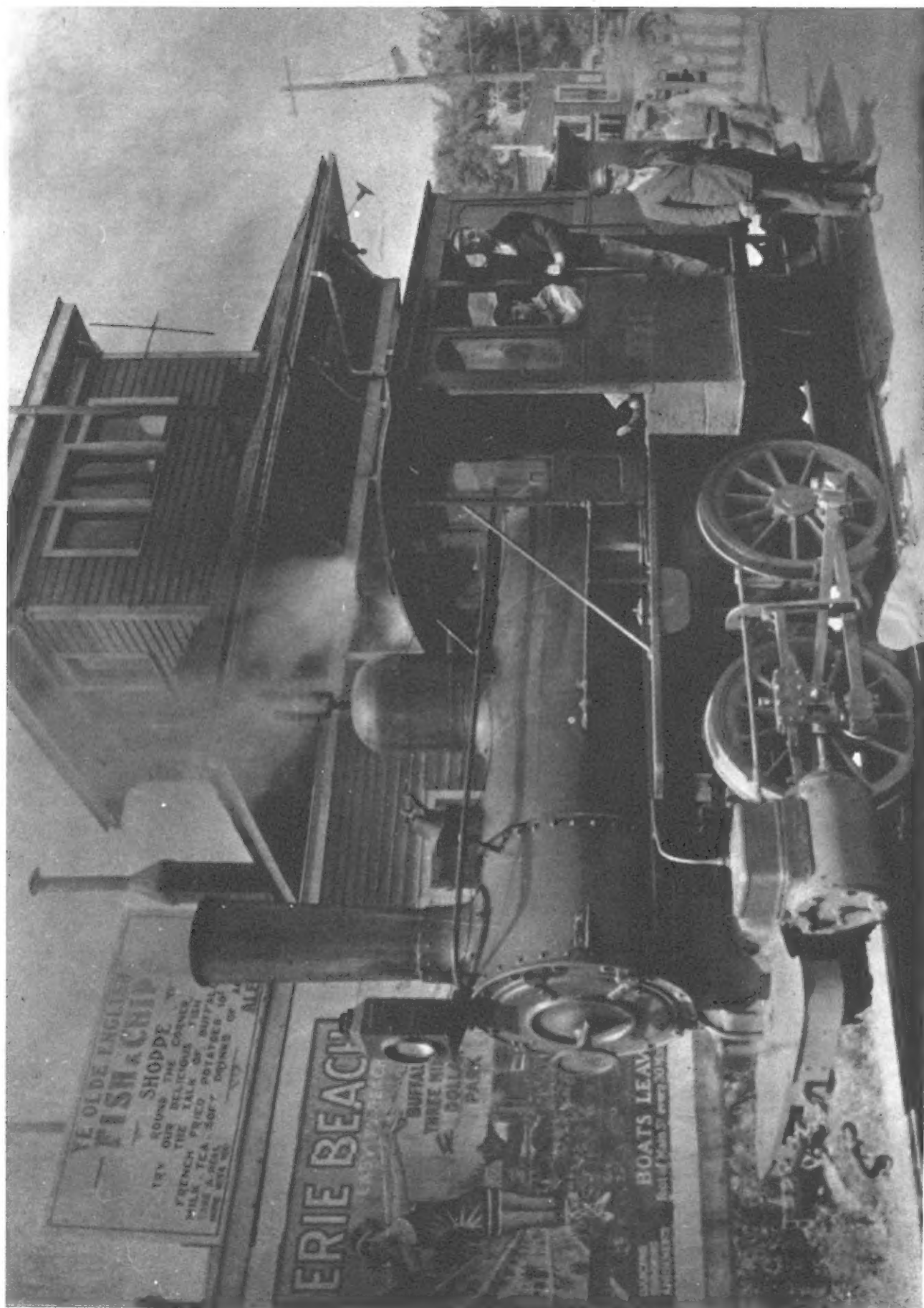


The SEABREEZE was a little workhorse in the Buffalo area. Used mostly on the Grand Island route, often with one or two barges lashed along its sides, it could turn up almost anywhere as a group charter boat.



A good drydock shot of the OSSIAN BEDELL, usually on the Erie Beach run, but according to one of the rail posters, it also made trips to Niagara Falls. The Erie Beach trade could use a much smaller boat than the Crystal

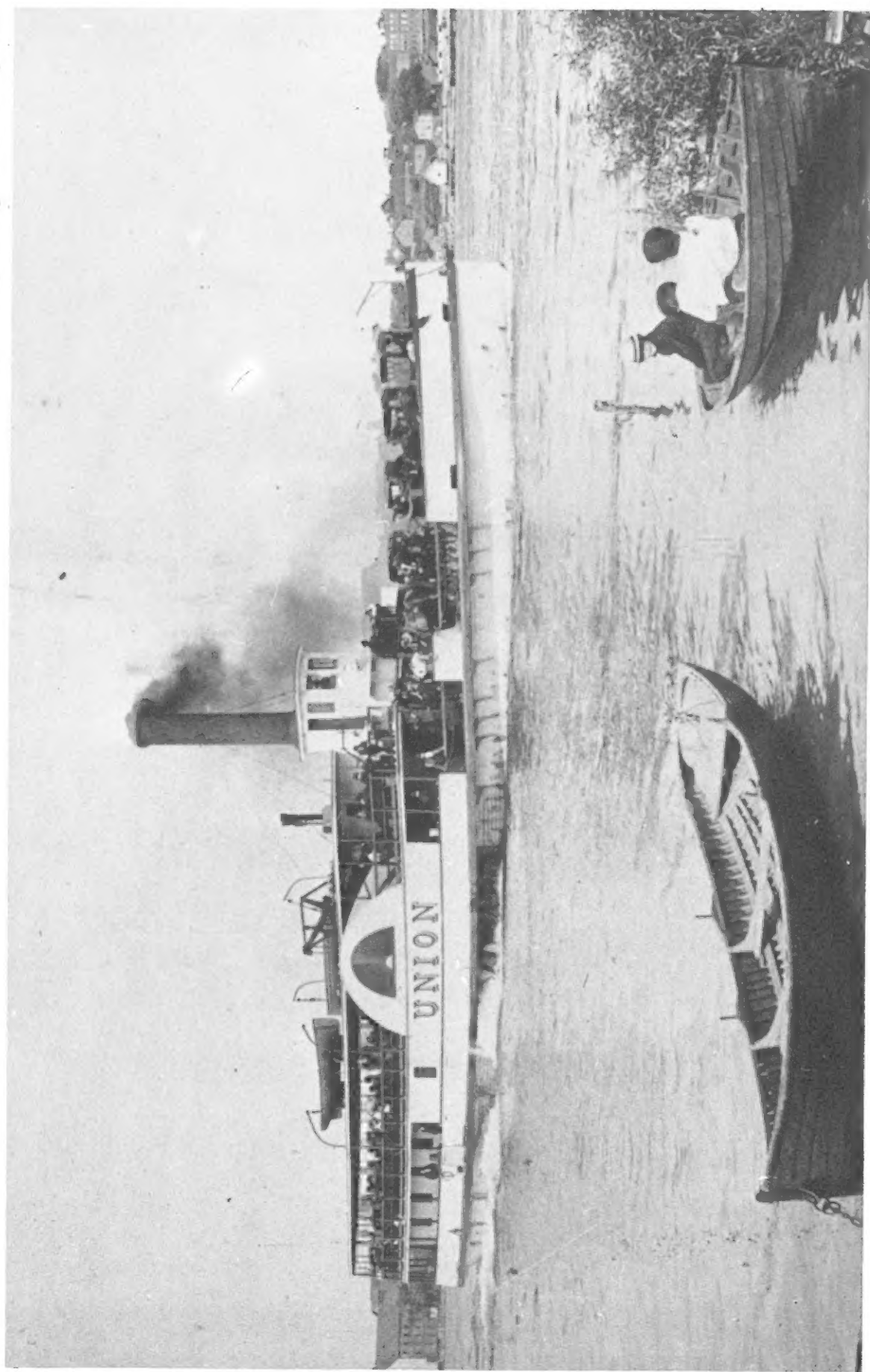
Beach as it was more of a river ferry trip than a long lake ride. Note the spacious wheelhouse, as large as some lake freighters.



A picture story of the Fort Erie transfer point from ferry steamer to Erie Beach train. Thousands made this low cost cruise and exciting rail trip to spend a day at Erie Beach, so graphically shown on the picture back of the engine at left. This little locomotive, an orphan from the New York Elevated railroad, was motive power for the Fort Erie, Snake Hill & Pacific Railroad, sometimes known as the "Sandfly Express."

Below, the ferry NIAGARA FRONTIER is unloading at her dock and the passengers are waiting for the train to arrive to carry them to the beach.





The ferry steamer UNION approaching the Fort Erie dock in the pre-automobile days. A close look will show more than one buggy owner "holding his horses" on the windy prow of this old

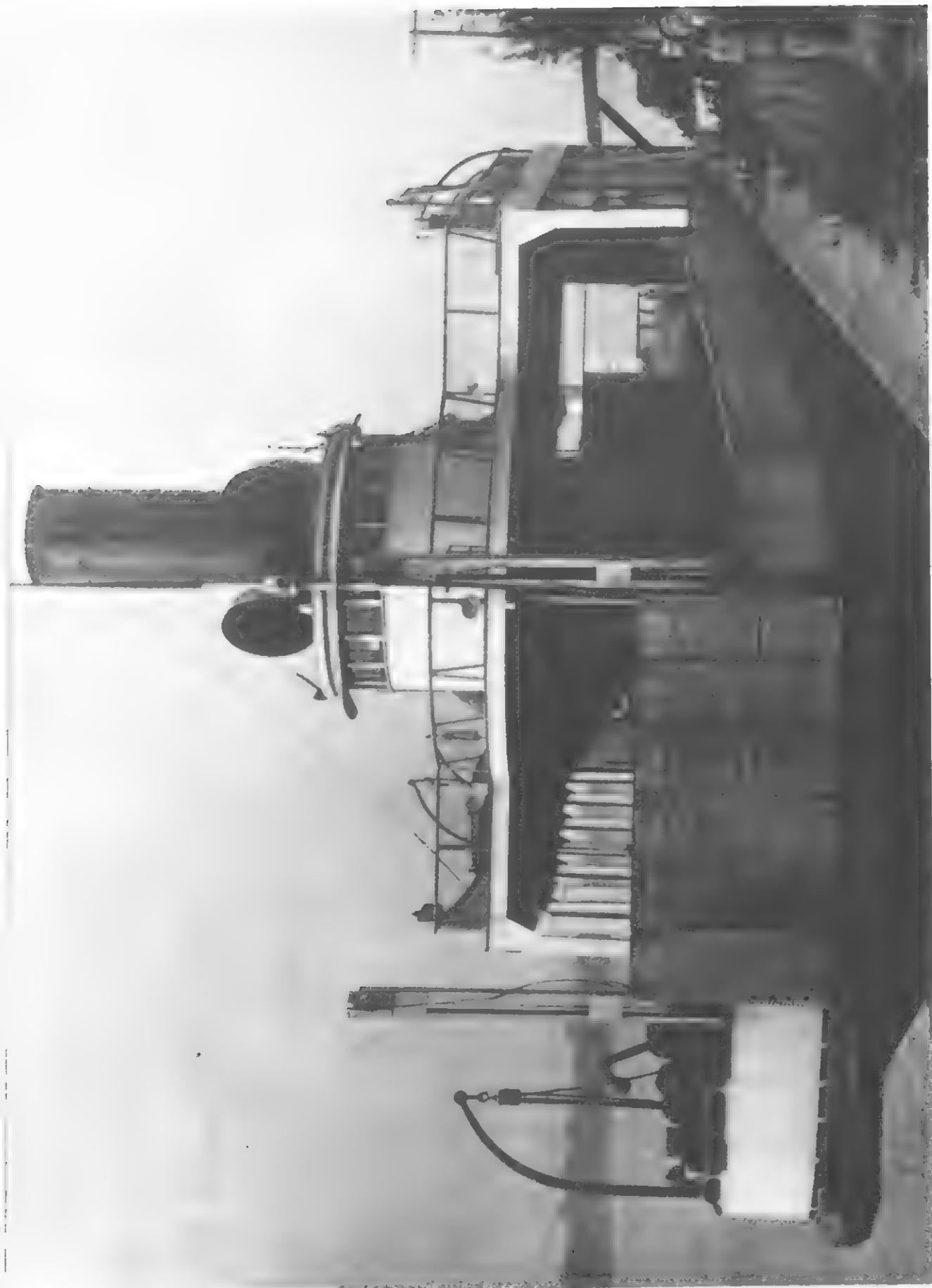
side wheeler, built in 1864 and destroyed in 1909. The lapstrake rowboats blend perfectly with the high stack steamer.



The ferry NIAGARA FRONTIER going upriver with a light load. This boat operated from 1910 to 1916 and then was sold for further use as a supply ship at Sault Ste. Marie. At this time the ferries were still side loading, adequate for the few carriages and many foot passengers.

The FRANKLIN must have been in drydock on a rush job, as it has steam up. By 1920, when this picture was taken, the automobile business had necessitated end loading. The second deck folding gangplank matched the two level docks on both sides of the river, keeping foot passengers separate from the vehicles.





The CITY OF TOLEDO, shown here anchored on the Buffalo side of the river, was a rebuild from an old steamer built in 1891, and by far the largest ferry on the river. Its large car carrying capacity made it very profitable on summer weekends when hundreds of cars headed for the

fun and sand on the Canadian shore. On these days it would operate with either of the smaller GRAND ISLAND or ORLEANS. It was the lucky motorist who was in line when it landed; he had a much better chance of being carried.



The pilot on the CITY OF TOLEDO had his hands full between the tricky landings and the swift Niagara River current.

For years no advertising was necessary, but in the depression days of the 1930's the Peace Bridge toll was around double the 15 cent fare on the ferries, and they enjoyed a good business. This picture was made at Grand Island during winter layup.

RIDE THE FERRY

50c Saved by an Average Car a Round Trip

**ANY
SIZE
CAR
AND
DRIVER**

15c

•

2

STEAMERS



**10 RIDES
FOR \$1.00
BY
Purchasing
BOOK
OF
TICKETS**

•

2

STEAMERS

BUFFALO & FORT ERIE FERRY CO.

Steamers Leave at Foot of Ferry St.

Service Every Few Minutes

The ORLEANS had a long service on the Fort Erie ferry run and was the last boat to operate.

Picture at right was taken at the Grand Island storage dock during its last days and shows the square wheelhouse. Shot below is an earlier picture out in the river, with original rounded front wheel house. The deck cargo of cars would bring a good price today. Noted are a Model T Ford, and Essex, and a 1924 Buick!



The GRAND ISLAND at one time worked to its namesake island, but spent its later years on the Fort Erie run. The picture was taken from the upper deck of the CITY OF TOLEDO as they passed in the middle of the river in the late 1930's.



ROSTER OF SHIPS PICTURED

SHIP	OWNER (AT BUFFALO)	OFFICIAL NUMBER	BLT.	AT	GROSS TONNAGE	LENGTH	HULL BREADTH	DISPOSITION
OSSIAN BEDELL	Buffalo & Erie Beach Transit Co.	155414	1901	Buffalo	296	104.3	28.0	Sold to Detroit Interests
SEABREEZE	Frank Fix	204279	1907	Buffalo	87	96.0	22.5	Same as above — 1946
AMERICANA	Crystal Beach Transit Co. Inc.	205096	1908	Buffalo	969	209.7	45.0	Sold to N.Y.C. for Rye Beach Service
CANADIANA	Crystal Beach Transit Co. Inc.	207479	1910	Buffalo	974	209.7	45.0	Laid up at Cleveland (1970)
UNION		92654*	1864	Kingston Ontario	267	132.0	26.0	Sunk 1909
CITY OF TOLEDO	Charles V. Fix	126738	1891	Toledo	670	250.6	33.7	Scrapped, Hamilton, Ont. 1948
FRANKLIN		81692	1894	St. Clair, Mich.	140	80.0	21.0	Beached, Bedell House 30's
ORLEANS	Charles F. Fix	220876	1898	Levis, Quebec	269	118.0	28.0	Scrapped, 1955
GRAND ISLAND		207917	1910	Buffalo	222	102.2	29.0	Converted to sand sucker
NIAGARA FRONTIER	Buffalo & Grand Island Ferry Co.	207434	1910	Buffalo	421	119.8	38.9	To Sault St. Marie as supply boat

*Canadian Registry

